



A Challenging Year

Chronicling the Pandemic: Alexandria's Story



Photo: Anna Frame

A collecting initiative of the
Office of Historic Alexandria

Introduction:

In the late spring of 2020, the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) launched an effort to collect objects, images, artwork, and the experiences of those living and working in Alexandria to help document the impact of the pandemic on our community.

People responded with photographs that reflect the isolation, change and resilience that affected our daily lives during this unprecedented time. Others expressed their thoughts in poems, writings and oral history interviews conducted by OHA staff.

Some submitted videos of local events and activities that were altered due to public health precautions.

Here is a sampling of submissions that have been gathered from our community during this past year. Many thanks to all who have contributed to this public history project, and enabled City historians to document this challenging year for the future.

The project is on-going. If you would like to donate objects or images, or share your story with us, please visit **historicalalexandria.org** to contribute.

Covering Up for Covid

It's been a year of masks...in all kinds of designs, home-made and store bought. From the beginning, some Alexandria businesses, like dry cleaners, put their seamsters to work making masks for the community. In some cases, profits from those sales helped support employees who could not work.



Photo: Historic Alexandria



Photo: Yates Dry Cleaning



Photo: Janet Hawkins



Photo: Janet Hawkins

Supporting Our Health Care Heroes

Early in the pandemic, the public showed its gratitude for health care workers with home-made signs and fund-raising efforts. Inova Alexandria Hospital's support organization, TWIG, donated \$100,000 to the hospital's Covid-19 emergency fund.



Photo: Historic Alexandria

Perspectives on the Pandemic: Musings

The circumstances we find
Ourselves in
This spring
Compel a pause
Of unknown duration
Time with which
We can contemplate
Our increasingly colored dreams
Time with whom
We can really get to know
Time with how
Will we learn to live anew
Time to discover
A new connection to grace
Because that is what we have
To get through with
Grace to guide us home
Grace to be our home
And when it's done
Will we say we got through

Or perhaps
Will we say we found
Something in our life
That is new
And we carry it on
Through the light and the dark
As a new totem to us
A new grace for our heart

-Rob Krupicka,
From a series of poems written in the
spring of 2020.

Around Town: Spreading Cheer



Across the City, residents showed appreciation to front-line workers, and left messages of care and encouragement.



Photos: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Perspectives on the Pandemic: On the Front Porch

from oral history interviews

Billy Sabitini, photographed about 400 Alexandria families in front of their homes during the lock-down period for the Front Steps (Porch) Project, a national documentary endeavor. He viewed his efforts as a way to give back to the community, and help people through the isolation of that time period.

“I saw this idea, second hand through another photographer, and I really wanted to do that for my town...so people can have these pictures documenting this slice of life and time...I didn’t want people to dress up and pose like a family portrait...I wanted people to be real and to document this very specific time and thing that everyone’s going through together...something as simple as giving them a family portrait that could provide some joy in people’s lives...people would keep telling me that they really appreciated it.” July 2020.



Michele Islas, a volunteer with Mother of Light Center in Arlandria, helped provide rental and food assistance to more than 500 vulnerable residents during the pandemic, and also photographed families for the Front Porch Project during the quarantine period.

“Looking at pictures [from across the country], I noticed that there was not a lot of diversity...So I asked my families if I could take some photos of them so they could remember what it was like being in quarantine in their apartments.” August 2020.

Photo: Michele Islas

Photo: Anna Frame



Around Town: Staying Positive



Photo: Anna Frame



Photo:
Elizabeth
Bennett-Parker



Photo: Elizabeth
Bennett-Parker



Photo: Anna Frame



Volunteers helped conduct mass Covid testing around Memorial Day 2020 at several sites in the City.

Volunteers at the first World Central Kitchen food distribution effort at Four Mile Run.

Photos: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Around Town: Volunteers Mobilize

Throughout the year, from Covid testing and food distribution to current vaccination efforts in Alexandria, volunteers have provided essential support to their fellow citizens.



Perspectives on the Pandemic: Reaching Out to Others

from oral history interviews & written submissions

“I would say 90% of our families lost their jobs due to Covid 19. Most of them were in the restaurant and hotel industry....The hardest part for me working with my clients is when they call and they’re having a hard time I can’t give them a hug. I can’t hold their hand.”

-**Michele Islas**, a volunteer with Mother of Light Center in Arlandria, June 2020.

“I love to serve others, but the pandemic has made it more difficult to touch the hand of someone dying in the hospital – my prayers are now done over the phone...Board meetings, funerals, classes and church are over Zoom.”

-**Jennifer Gillyard**, Chaplain at Inova Alexandria Hospital, December 2020.



“During this time we were busy even at night during curfews. Most people in distress were stuck trying to find a gas station that was still open or had a flat tire and couldn’t find help...Our company offered free delivery of food to truckers who could not find a place to eat...and free assistance to the elderly...We worked for free pretty much during the Covid-19 event to make sure motorists were able to get home and not be stranded...” -**Frank Scheer**, Owner, Road Res-Q, Old Town Alexandria, June 2020.

Photo: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Not Business as Usual



Pre-Order: Ben Brenman Park
Farmer's Market
Photos: Historic Alexandria



Sign in Old Town
salon window
Photo: Anna Frame

Grab & Go
*Photo: Elizabeth
Bennett-Parker*



Shopping Appointments
Photo: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker



Photo: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

CLOSED for Business



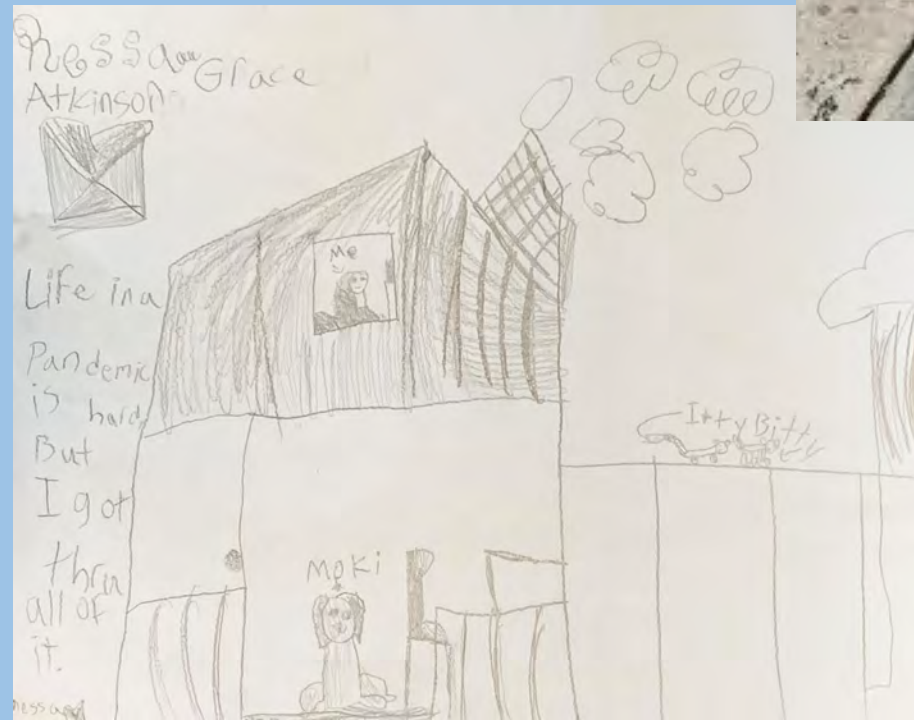
Photo: Historic Alexandria

While some public facilities and businesses closed temporarily, others could not withstand the economic hardship of the pandemic. Atlantis Pizza, a family restaurant in the West End's Bradlee Shopping Center for 38 years, closed in 2021. OHA collected memorabilia from the popular eatery.

Kids React & Adapt



Photo: Anna Frame



Photo, top: Patricia Atkinson;
drawing by Nessa Atkinson

From a wistful thought left on a public sidewalk to keeping positive, kids expressed their reactions to the pandemic. Seven-year-old Nessa Atkinson drew her home and reflected on a difficult year.

Perspectives on the Pandemic: Family Life

From oral history Interviews & written submissions

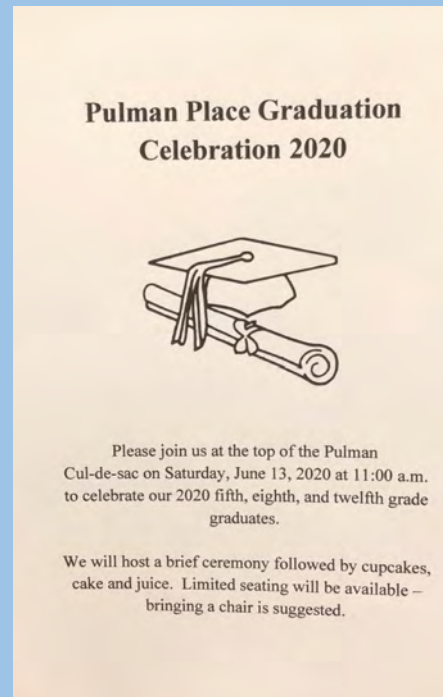
“One of the things that we did as a family to get through those early days was my youngest daughter (a second grader at MacArthur) decided that we should celebrate a different holiday every Sunday. So she would be the party planner.”

-**Michele Islas**, Alexandria resident, August, 2020.

“I lost my senior year and senior soccer season which was really hard...But we made do with fake proms, virtual graduation and a drive through senior night.”

-**Caley Zack**, student, Seminary Valley neighborhood, June 2020.

Photo: Dana Wedeles



“COVID has been a challenging time to be a working parent with two young kids at home. There is no down time and there is a constant feeling at the end of each day of not having accomplished anything...Each weekend night our neighbors pull out lawn chairs and set up a socially distanced happy hour in our driveways. We have celebrated birthdays, anniversaries, and graduations together this way. This summer our garage is being turned into “summer camp”...The video I’d like to share is of our cul-de-sac graduation...A time like this truly makes you appreciate your community.”

-**Dana Wedeles**, City of Alexandria employee and resident, July 2020.

Perspectives on the Pandemic: Serving the Public

“I’m reaching out to chronicle the essential service AlexRenew employees have provided to the community during the pandemic. These brave men and women are on the front lines everyday treating Alexandria’s wastewater 24/7, 365 days a year. We have videos that show how AlexRenew is adapting during the pandemic.”

-Sheeva Noshirvan, June 2020.



“I did serve as an election officer but with great concern this year for myself and peers, but the City equipped us well with training and PPE, and members from the medical corps on site.”

-Jennifer Gillyard, election official & INOVA Alexandria Hospital chaplain, Dec. 2020.



Photo: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

ALIVE! Food bags for distribution at the bus barn on Quaker Lane

Photo top left: Jennifer Gillyard

Photo left: Angie Maniglia Turner

Around Town: Honoring Lives Lost



Photo: Amy Gareis

Several community efforts paid tribute to those who lost their lives due to the pandemic. Del Ray Artisans hosted a paint-a-panel event and candlelight ceremony as part of the Covid-19 US Honor Quilt project. Christ Church commemorated Alexandrians who died of the disease with a flag installation on the grounds of the historic church.



Photos: Anna Frame

Humor Helped Us Cope



*Photos: Top,
Historic
Alexandria;
Right, Elizabeth
Bennett-Parker*



*Photos Left, Top &
Bottom: Anna Frame*

Reflections on the Pandemic from Oral History Interviews

“[The Pandemic] has made me think about the resilience of the human spirit, even in times of crisis...and that I can be resilient.” – **Alyssa Barilotti**, Alexandria Archaeology volunteer, June 2020.

“What I have learned during this time is...I don’t need to go across the world to be a missionary to help others. There’s a need right here in my neighborhood...we are all a community and deserving of friendship and help...”
–**Michele Islas**, June 2020.



Photo: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

“I think it’s served to reaffirm the importance of being part of a community...There’s so much of life that is meant to be shared. It’s meant to be something you experience with other people. And when you’re not with other people it isn’t just diminished, it’s not what it should be.”
–**Michael Kutner**, Medical Reserve Corps volunteer, July 2020.

STOP THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

DETENGA LA PROPAGACIÓN DEL COVID-19 የ COVID-19 ስርዓትን ያስቆጠር عندما تكون بالقرب من الآخرين



**IT'S THE LAW:
FACE COVERINGS
ARE REQUIRED INSIDE**

Es La Ley: Se requiere el uso de tapabocas o telas faciales adentro.

ህግ ነው። ወደ ውስጥ ሲገቡ የፊት ጭንብል ማድረግ አለብዎት።

هذا هو القانون: يجب ارتداء غطاء الوجه داخل المبنى

1-877-ASK-VDH3

ALEXANDRIAVA.GOV/CORONAVIRUS

5.28.20



Turning the Corner Vaccines are Here!



**PROTECT YOURSELF
FROM COVID-19: GET
VACCINATED!**

There are safe, effective, and free COVID-19 vaccines that can save your life. If enough people get vaccinated, we can fight unemployment, keep schools open, and get back to normal.

VACCINE SUPPLIES ARE LIMITED, BUT YOU QUALIFY RIGHT NOW IF YOU:

- Are 65+ years old
- Have existing medical conditions
- Work in one of these jobs:
 - Healthcare
 - Police, Fire and Hazmat
 - Corrections and homeless shelter workers
 - Childcare and K-12 teachers and staff
 - Agriculture
 - Manufacturing
 - Grocery store workers
 - Public transit workers
 - Mail carriers (USPS and private)
 - Officials needed to keep government working
 - Cleaning/Janitorial staff
 - Faith Leaders

HOW TO SIGN UP:

- Fill out the form on alexandriava.gov/Vaccines
- Call 703.746.4988 if you don't have internet access
- Supplies are limited so you may not get an appointment right away

ALEXANDRIAVA.GOV/VACCINES

2.25.21

*Photos: Historic Alexandria
& City of Alexandria*